

Cambria City and Minersville Neighborhoods  
Johnstown  
Cambria County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5672

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## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

### CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE NEIGHBORHOODS

HABS No. PA-5672

Millville . . . lies on the western side of Johnstown and is separated from it by the Conemaugh river. . . . The greater part of this town was built and is owned by the Cambria Iron Company. It is peopled almost exclusively by the employees of the rolling mill. . . . The Lower part of the town is called Minersville. A substantial bridge upon which is a roadway for wagons and pedestrians, a railroad track for a locomotive, and another track for the company's coal trains, spans the river, and connects this town with Cambria Borough . . . usually called Cambria City. . . . It is principally made up of employees of the Cambria Iron Works.<sup>1</sup>

Cambria City and Minersville lie along the Conemaugh River in the western end of Johnstown (fig. 1.1). Within sight of the now-quiet works of the Bethlehem Steel plant, the two neighborhoods are quiet, clean, and peaceful. The streets are narrow, clustered with small rowhouses, simple frame dwellings, and large double houses.

Cambria City, one-half-mile wide, ten blocks long, and rectangular in shape, lies between the Conemaugh River to the north, and steep, heavily wooded hillsides to the south. The tracks of the Pennsylvania Railroad, snaking around the base of the hills, further determine the southern boundary of Cambria City. To the east and west are the mills and workyards of the Bethlehem Steel Company.

Minersville, roughly triangular in shape, also lies next to the river, opposite Cambria City and backed by a collection of small hills. Like the latter, Minersville looks over the lower works of Bethlehem Steel, just east of Minersville beyond a sweeping bend in the Conemaugh River. In the location of these neighborhoods, one sees clearly how natural features have always determined residence in Johnstown. "The makeup of 'Greater Johnstown,'" noted a recent observer, "closely reflected its topographic conditions . . . and formed what Johnstown [is today]: an agglomeration of loosely connected boroughs separated from each other by hills and creeks."<sup>2</sup>

While Cambria City is entirely flat, Minersville rises and falls along the side of Benshoff Hill. Both neighborhoods are distinctly separate from Johnstown proper, accessible by state route 56 that winds along the Conemaugh, west from downtown.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas J. Chapman, The Valley of the Conemaugh (Altoona, Pa., 1865), 113-14, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Ewa Morawska, For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 83.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 2)

Many neighborhood residents are elderly, perhaps fond of the sense of permanence in their 130-year-old neighborhoods. Work, church, and family have long been cherished by local residents. Their traditional devotion to religion, brought to America from the old world of Europe, is apparent everywhere. Stand in Minersville, look across the river to Cambria City, and you are witness to the ancestral homes of the residents (HABS No. PA-5672-1). The Byzantine splendor of St. Mary's Church, the Gothic massiveness of Immaculate Conception, the Baroque charm of St. Stephen's--these and seven other edifices are mute testimonial to a traditional reverence for the church, awakening on Sundays to welcome the worshippers. During the week, much of the work of the neighborhoods' residents is elsewhere in Johnstown; yet they still live in working-class neighborhoods, anchored by a strong devotion to working-class values.

Today, the steel mills produce a fraction of their previous output. Most of the mines are closed. Even before the economic downturn of the 1960s and 1970s in Johnstown, Cambria City was showing its age. The area south of Broad Street was too dilapidated, too rundown and just plain old, claimed advocates of urban renewal in the 1950s. And so a multi-block area was demolished, relegating McConaughy Street, Bradley Alley, and half of Cambria City to history, to the dismay of the remaining residents. The pace of activity in Minersville has also slowed in recent years,<sup>3</sup> but residents of both neighborhoods are adapting to the changes, just as their immigrant ancestors did more than a century ago.

Some citizens can recall the early years of the century when all their needs could be found within the confines of the neighborhoods, and the population was swelled with East European immigrants who came to Johnstown to work for the steel company. Life in Cambria City and Minersville in those days was crowded and hectic. There was always noise and activity: from the several distilleries and bottling factories; of workers periodically passing by on their way to and from shifts at the mills and mines; of commercial activity in the stores, hotels, and saloons; of women rushing to cater to their families and boarders, or to go to work in the small cigar factories; of the buzz of different languages picked up in passing on the street; from the toll of church bells; and of children playing in the streets and alleys. Above it all hung the acrid smoke of the ironworks--a plague to the women on washing days and a constant reminder of what had drawn them to Cambria City and Minersville.

David McConaughy and James P. McConaughy founded Cambria City in 1853. With the establishment of the Cambria Iron Company in 1852, the future of Johnstown appeared bright. The McConaughys laid out lots along the left bank of the Conemaugh river and sold them to workmen of Cambria Iron.<sup>4</sup> The new

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<sup>3</sup> "Minersville Faded, Not Finished," Johnstown Tribune-Democrat April 7, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Daniel Shappee, "A History of Johnstown and the Great Flood of 1889: A Study of Disaster and

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 3)

neighborhood quickly became "a large and thriving place," noted a contemporary observer. With Cambria City "being located so near the iron works," said S.B. McCormick in 1853, "it is destined to become a good business place."<sup>5</sup> The Borough of Cambria, a political entity independent of Johnstown, was established in 1861. The creation of Cambria reflected what early historian Thomas Chapman called the "increased importance of Johnstown" after the arrival of the Cambria Iron Company in the 1850s. "Scores of new houses were immediately put up," he recorded in 1865, and "offshoots from the town sprang up . . . [that] now compose the boroughs of Millville, Cambria, and Prospect."<sup>6</sup>

Minersville was the Second Ward of Millville Borough, incorporated in 1858. The area directly west of the Cambria ironworks and Hinckston Run--the "lower part" of Millville Borough, Chapman called it--became known as Minersville, a distinction made apparent in every city directory after 1869. James P. McConaughy and others built a toll bridge across the Conemaugh River just downstream from the Point in 1853, providing access to the steel mills for the residents of both neighborhoods and linking the neighborhoods more closely to Johnstown.<sup>7</sup>

Both Cambria City and Minersville grew quickly; their prosperity was directly connected to the success of the Cambria Iron Company as it expanded to become one of the major steelmakers in America. In 1856, only four years after the company's founding, its mills employed 1,500 workers. By the late 1880s the work force numbered 7,000. The collective population of Johnstown and the boroughs doubled between 1860 and 1870, and doubled again between 1880 and 1890. Cambria City grew to 1,500 residents in 1868, 2,323 in 1880 and 2,902 in 1889.<sup>8</sup> Minersville grew to 1,180 residents in 1890.<sup>9</sup>

Cambria Iron was more than just a steel manufacturer; the company mined its own coal and coke, and operated its own railroads. The company owned thousands of acres of land, farmed hundreds of acres, built and rented out

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Rehabilitation" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1940), 21.

<sup>5</sup> S. B. McCormick, A Sketch of Johnstown and Suburbs, and the Cambria Iron Works (Pittsburgh: Barr and Myers, 1867), 10.

<sup>6</sup> Chapman, 111.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 122, and Henry Wilson Storey, History of Cambria County, Pennsylvania (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1907), 3: 265. See Deed Book Vol. 20, p. 453, Cambria County Courthouse, for a contemporary map of the bridge location.

<sup>8</sup> Shappee, 122.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., and Storey, 3: 265.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 4)

rows of employee houses, and operated a company store.<sup>10</sup> Johnstown, observed historian Ewa Morawska, was "[s]elf-contained amid the hills of western Pennsylvania and dominated by one industry and one powerful employer . . . with about two-thirds of its male population in manufacturing and mining; non-unionized, ethnically fragmented, and tightly controlled by the established Anglo-Protestant elite. . . ."<sup>11</sup> To call Johnstown a "company town," then, is to understate the role of the Cambria Iron Company in the city's development and prosperity.

Citizens of both Cambria City and Millville, concluded David McCullough, "lived on the payroll of the Cambria mills,"<sup>12</sup> specifically the nearby Lower Works. Immigrant workers of various ethnic groups were attracted first to the Johnstown area, and then to the neighborhoods of Cambria City and Minersville. With their convenient locations near the steel mills, the neighborhoods attracted iron and steel workers, miners, and railroad workers. The new arrivals, not usually welcome in the older areas of Johnstown proper, settled in suburbs such as Cambria City and Minersville. "Native" Americans made up at least 50 percent of the ironworkers living in each of Johnstown's five wards, but matched this proportion in only one of the suburbs (Coopersdale).<sup>13</sup>

For the first several decades after their founding, Irish and Welsh immigrants made up the majority of the population in Minersville; Irish and German immigrants were the strongest presence in Cambria City. In 1870 69 percent of all the Irish millworkers lived in either Cambria City or Millville. Sixty-seven percent of all German ironworkers lived in Johnstown's First Ward, or in Conemaugh Borough, Yoder Township, or Cambria City. City directories for the greater Johnstown area during this period record numerous residents of Cambria City and Minersville with names such as Clark, Coligan, Donnelly, Dougherty, Finegan, Hollahan, Kelly, McCloskey, Ryan, and others; similarly, the boroughs were home to many named Freidhoff, Kintz, Kurtz, Mayer, Rineholt and others.<sup>14</sup>

Upon arrival each ethnic group followed a similar pattern of establishing itself as an active community. One of its first steps was to organize and pool resources to build a church. Community members often contributed time and labor as well as money, helping to excavate the site and

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<sup>10</sup> David McCullough, The Johnstown Flood (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 28. Morawska, 83-85.

<sup>11</sup> Morawska, 20.

<sup>12</sup> McCullough, 28.

<sup>13</sup> John William Bennett, "Iron Workers in Woods Run and Johnstown: The Union Era, 1865-1895" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Pittsburgh, 1977), 342.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 337-42.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS

HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 5)

haul building materials. The first church was typically a wood-frame structure, but these were eventually replaced or encased with brick. In some cases this second building was later replaced by a larger brick or stone building, mirroring the stability and fervor of the established community.

The German contingent of Cambria City built its first church--St. Mary's German Catholic--in 1859. In 1862 the parish established the borough's first parochial school. A Swedish Catholic Church, also founded by Germanic immigrants, was built at the corner of Fourth Avenue and Power Street.<sup>15</sup>

After their churches were firmly established, residents formed social and civic organizations. The Germans founded the Cambria City Mannechor, or men's choir, in 1868. Their Mannechor Hall was destroyed in the 1889 flood and a new building was built at 210 Chestnut St. in 1899 (HABS No. PA-5757). German residents were also instrumental in forming Cambria City's Fire, Hook, and Ladder Company in 1887. The fire station building was constructed at 624 Broad St. some time between 1891 and 1895 (HABS No. PA-5739).<sup>16</sup>

By 1889 the borough's retail and business community flourished. Patrick Connelley, William Stemmel, John Kintz, and Martin Weiss sold supplies from their general stores. Fred Stemmel operated a restaurant on Chestnut Street. Jacob Goenner's brewery at the corner of Third and Power streets quenched the neighborhood thirst (HABS No. PA-5770). Charles Boyle, Christian Eger, and J. P. Kintz served up drinks in their saloons along Broad and Chestnut streets. Two physicians, a photographer, and a wagon maker served the neighborhood. Residents utilized blacksmiths, four barbers, druggists, a livery, several hotels, four butchers, and a shoemaker. After 1883, a streetcar line ran the entire length of Cambria City to Morrellville; the Lincoln Bridge and the Minersville Bridge spanned the Conemaugh and reached into Minersville. Hundreds of wood-framed dwellings filled the blocks of both neighborhoods.<sup>17</sup>

One of the few houses that survives from this period dates from about 1865 when its owner, George Wagner, was taxed for a house on half the lot at 418 Broad St. (HABS N. PA-5752). An 1876 city directory listed Wagner as a laborer for the Cambria Iron Company; the 1880 census records described him as a 50-year-old German with a wife and seven children, who had come to America in 1853. His oldest sons also worked in the coal mines and steel mill.

Wagner's home remains relatively unaltered. It is a small, two-story, three-bay, single-family dwelling and, like the majority of homes in Cambria City and Minersville, is a wood-frame structure with horizontal wood siding.

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<sup>15</sup> Sanborn Map Co., Johnstown, Pennsylvania (New York, 1895).

<sup>16</sup> "Volunteer Interest Ran High at the Time of the Flood," Johnstown Tribune-Democrat August 22, 1953.

<sup>17</sup> Clark's Johnstown Directory for 1889 (Altoona, Penna.: N.C. Barclay and Sons, 1889). Sanborn Map Co., Johnstown, Pennsylvania (New York, 1886).

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 6)

Rectangular in plan, measuring 22' x 28', it features flat-arched windows and a side-gable roof. The 1891 Sanborn map shows there was an outdoor oven in the backyard, but this was gone by 1895.

Another Cambria City residence built prior to 1889 is 202 Chestnut St., the home of George and Catherine Lorditch (HABS No. PA-5755). George Lorditch immigrated from Germany and, by 1866, was the owner of this property. For several years he worked as a puddler in the steel mill, but in 1886 he operated a cigar factory and tobacconist shop--selling tobacco, snuff, and pipes--at this address. Like many of the shops in Cambria City, the Lorditch house was situated on a corner lot and has its shop entrance on the corner of the building.

Lorditch's children included four sons and a daughter who stayed on in the neighborhood. Son Joseph worked as a shoemaker and later a teamster, John was a tobacconist, and Michael a laborer. In 1900 Lorditch and his wife, Catherine, their widowed daughter, Mary Bopp, and son Joseph and his family, all lived at 202 Chestnut St.

On May 31, 1889, the investment of time and labor of all these immigrants in building the churches, homes, and businesses of Cambria City was lost with the collapse of the South Fork Dam. Throughout Johnstown, a few cautious citizens sounded the warning of the impending collapse of the nearby dam, but Johnstownners had heard the warning many times before, and they ignored it once again. Two Johnstown men, Alexander Adair and Richard Eyre, alerted by a train engineer of the danger at the dam, apparently relayed the first warning to Cambria City. Ignored by Cambria citizens, the message was next sent to a Cambria Borough official and "Squire Bland" of Millville Borough.<sup>18</sup>

At 3:10 p.m. the dam gave way and an hour later floodwaters ripped through Johnstown. The force of the flood was temporarily checked by the barrier of the Pennsylvania Railroad stone bridge a few hundred feet from the neighborhoods. Within minutes 148 houses were immediately destroyed in Cambria City; the flood spared Minersville from great destruction because of its hilly locale.<sup>19</sup> Two nearby bridges, the Minersville Bridge and the Ten Acre Bridge, were carried away. "Cambria City had been ravaged past recognition," concluded David McCullough in his account of the flood. "At least two-thirds of the houses had been wiped out, and down the entire length of its main street [Broad Street] a tremendous pile of mud and rock had been dumped."<sup>20</sup> A contemporary retelling of the flood's effect on Cambria City noted that the surge of water "took every house on Front and Walnut Streets

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<sup>18</sup> Shappee, 252.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>20</sup> McCullough, 185.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 7)

[Power Street and Roosevelt Boulevard] but one and most of those on Chestnut Street besides wrecking a hundred or more on other streets."<sup>21</sup>

The relatively undamaged areas of Cambria City were mostly along the first five blocks of McConaughy Street, an east-west route bordering the protective hillside south of the neighborhood. (McConaughy Street has since been removed from Cambria City by urban renewal.) The 900 block of Broad Street and Chestnut Street, St. Mary's German Catholic Church at Third Avenue and Broad Street, and a scattering of homes and businesses also survived. At least eleven pre-flood houses remain in Cambria City today.<sup>22</sup>

The death toll was high. At least 372 persons perished in Cambria, ninety-five in Millville.<sup>23</sup> St. Columba's Catholic Church at the corner of Tenth Avenue and Chestnut Street served as one of Johnstown's many morgues for the more than 2,000 victims of the disaster.

Like all of Johnstown, the neighborhoods drew strength from the immediate resumption of operations at the Cambria Iron Company. Millions of dollars in relief aid poured into the city. Residents picked themselves up, rebuilt the town, and moved forward. An 1891 city directory celebrated the recovery by proclaiming: "There are more people in this valley now than ever before . . . with buildings vastly superior to those before the disaster."<sup>24</sup> Two lumber yards, shown in Cambria City on the 1895 Sanborn map, must have been supported by all the new construction. Cambria City was nearly rebuilt by 1895, containing over 350 buildings; significantly, a number of sturdier brick buildings had been erected.

Members of St. Columba's Irish Catholic parish, founded late in 1887, cleaned up and repaired their church and began making plans to build a grander one on the lot they had reserved on Broad Street (HABS No. PA-5741). Renowned church architect John T. Comes was commissioned to design an impressive Lombard Romanesque-style building that cost approximately \$93,000. It was completed in 1914.

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<sup>21</sup> Clark's Johnstown Directory for 1889, 48.

<sup>22</sup> Conclusions about intact areas are drawn from a postflood photograph of the Lower Works and Cambria City in the collection of the Johnstown Flood Museum, from the Illustrated Historical Atlas of Cambria County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Atlas Publishing Co., 1890), and from Sanborn Insurance Maps (New York, The Sanborn Company, 1886, 1891). Houses on the Sanborn maps were located in 1886 and then again in 1891 to determine if they survived the flood. This procedure is very inexact and the list here is not complete and probably not totally accurate. Some of the pre-flood houses are located at 202 Chestnut, 203 Chestnut, 207 Chestnut, 313 Chestnut, 318 Chestnut, 416 Chestnut, 421 Chestnut, 424 Chestnut, 318 Second, 414 Broad, and 418 Broad.

<sup>23</sup> Figures compiled from list of flood casualties in David C. McCullough, The Johnstown Flood. Of course, the neighborhood residents may have been elsewhere when they died and the number of deaths actually occurring inside each neighborhood may have been smaller. According to Shappee, 360 died in Cambria City, 115 in Millville.

<sup>24</sup> C. G. Clarke's Johnstown City Directory for 1891 (Altoona, Penna.: N. C. Garclay, 1891), 10.



CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 8)

St. Columba's parishioners must have felt some competitiveness with their neighbors down the street, the members of St. Mary's Immaculate Conception German Catholic Church. They had also begun construction of a new building in the late 1880s, but the flood badly damaged the almost-completed foundation. The parish lost 160 members in the disaster, but with the help of the Flood Relief Commission and the local diocese, the new church was completed in 1891. Only seventeen years later an ambitious new priest oversaw the completion of a third church designed by William P. Ginther of Akron, Ohio (HABS No. PA-5738).

Cambria City's small businesses were also soon re-established, led by the German community, the oldest in the neighborhood. The Cambria City Brewery was operated by the Coenner family. August G. Mayer, also a German, owned two meat markets on Broad Street and in 1908 he opened a slaughterhouse and sausage factory on Eighth Avenue (HABS No. PA-5925). One of Mayer's competitors was Samuel Pollak who, in 1905, commissioned local architect Walter Myton to design a three-story, brick building at 314-16 Broad St. to house his own meat market (HABS No. PA-5751). Pollak, an East European immigrant, represented the demographic shift that had begun to occur in Cambria City and other Johnstown communities during the last decades of the nineteenth century. After 1870 Poles, Croatsians, Slovenes, Magyars, Slovaks, Serbs, Rusyns, Ukranians, and other ethnic groups from Eastern Europe came to America in search of well-paying work in American industrial centers. In the 1890s and early 1900s they arrived in Johnstown in significantly greater numbers and fundamentally reordered the composition of Cambria City and Minersville (HABS Nos. PA-5740, PA-5763, PA-5778, and PA-5782).

The immigrants came to America as an extension of a practice of seasonal migration in search of work to supplement a meager agricultural living. They found jobs waiting for them in Johnstown because of changing technology in the steel industry. In the first two decades of Cambria Iron's operation, the company needed a large number of skilled workers. Ironmaking required the talents of rollers, puddlers, and heaters, for example. Irish, German, and Welsh immigrants usually filled these positions. But as the company's operations expanded into the era of modern steelmaking, machinery and technology began to replace skilled labor. Cambria Iron still required a large work force--but after 1870, it required large numbers of unskilled workers. In Cambria County after 1870, noted historian John Cable, "the demand for labor came from the iron and steel and the coal industries . . . in many cases it was a question of getting men--men of any nationality--rather than picking and choosing."<sup>25</sup>

Generally, the Cambria Iron Company management and most of the native-born residents of Johnstown looked with disdain upon the East Central Europeans, calling them "Polacks," "Hunkies," or "Slavs,"--and, most often,

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<sup>25</sup> John E. Gable, History of Cambria County, Pennsylvania (Topeka-Indianapolis: Historical Publishing Company, 1926), 11:71.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 9)

"Hungarians"--regardless of nationality.<sup>26</sup> Cambria City contained a population of 2,835, according to an 1891 Johnstown city directory, "quite a large number of whom are Hungarians--poor citizens and worse neighbors."<sup>27</sup> The newly arrived laborers moved into unskilled positions, the worst jobs in the mills, and were ridiculed for their language, customs, and the living conditions their low salaries forced upon them. The Irish, Germans, and Welsh, as veterans in the mills, dominated the ranks of skilled workers but felt threatened by these new men willing to do grueling work for low pay.

Cambria Iron management directed many of the newcomers into Cambria City and Minersville and before long the most recent immigrant group became the majority. As early as 1900, four out of every five residents were of East Central European descent.<sup>28</sup> These two neighborhoods became collectively known as the "foreign colony" or the "Hungarian section." An estimated 5,000 East Central Europeans lived in greater Johnstown by 1900.<sup>29</sup>

Like the Germans and Irish, one of the first things these immigrants did to anchor their communities was to establish parishes, congregations, and build churches. During the 1870s and 1880s, before there were enough East Europeans to support a church, many of these immigrants attended St. Mary's German Catholic church and participated in its social events. This involvement with an established group often proved helpful for more than religious reasons. These contacts could lead to better jobs at the mill and gave earlier arrivals an advantage over countrymen who immigrated in the twentieth century.<sup>30</sup>

The Slovaks were the first to organize an East European parish. They founded St. Stephen's Catholic Church in 1891, using the old Swedish Church at Fourth and Power streets until the present building was finished in 1909. They hired Walter Myton, who designed a monumental Baroque-style building exuberantly decorated on the exterior and interior (HABS Nos. PA-5672-3, PA-5744, and PA-5745).

Slovaks who followed the Lutheran religion purchased a house at 711 Chestnut St. and remodeled it to serve as their Holy Cross Lutheran Church and school in 1914 (HABS No. PA-5761). St. Mary's Syrian Orthodox Church, another

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<sup>26</sup> Michael P. Weber and Ewa Morawska, "East Central Europeans in Steel Towns: A Comparative Analysis," Journal of Urban History 11 (May 1985): 287, 289.

<sup>27</sup> C. B. Clarke's Johnstown City Directory for 1891 (Altoona, Penna.: N. C. Barclay, 1891), 24.

<sup>28</sup> Morawska, 97.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 109, 120, 193-94.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 10)

of the smaller Cambria City churches, was founded in 1911 (HABS No. PA-5746). The 1900 census recorded a number of Syrians living in Cambria City.

Slav immigrants founded St. Mary's Creek Catholic Byzantine Church in 1895 (HABS No. PA-5742). The present church building was dedicated in 1922, designed by John T. Comes who also designed St. Columba's. Hungarians founded St. Emerich's at 600 Chestnut St. in 1905 (HABS No. PA-5747). St. Emerich's parish was originally named for St. Ladislaus, and the present church was built in 1913. The Hungarian Reformed Church, erected in 1901 at 822 Chestnut St., served another segment of the Hungarian community (HABS No. PA-5764).

As the first established church among the East European groups, St. Stephen's acted as host to immigrants who were a little slower in organizing, just as St. Mary's served as a sponsor a few years earlier.<sup>31</sup> By 1901, the Croats were able to break away to attend their own newly dedicated St. Rochus Catholic Church at 800 Chestnut St. (HABS No. PA-5762). Polish immigrants began construction of St. Casimir's Catholic Church in 1902. The building, another Walter Myton design, was completed in 1907 (HABS No. PA-5743).

In many cases the immigrants organized formal social groups, preliminary to founding a church, and functioning in much the same way, providing the community with an identity and a focus of activity. St. Casimir's Society was formed in 1892 (HABS No. PA-5737). Just a few years after their church was complete, its members commissioned Walter Myton to build a society hall, the "Dom Polski," completed in 1915. The St. Rochus Catholic Church Lodge No. 5 of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America was founded in 1894. Its first hall was at Seventh Avenue and Bradley Alley in the since-demolished half of Cambria City. In 1920 the present Croatian Hall, "Hrvatska Dvorana," was completed (HABS No. PA-5753).

In addition to supporting church construction and maintenance and offering social diversions, these societies often sponsored health and life insurance funds or functioned as credit agencies. They can also indicate evolving disputes among ethnic factions and changing political conditions, usually struggles for nationalism, in Europe. The Polish National Alliance, Council No. 832, with a hall at 153 Benshoff St. in Minersville, was founded in 1907; it was originally called the "Free Poland Society" (HABS No. PA-5777).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Weber and Morawska, 307, note that initially boundaries between groups were "fuzzy," "reflecting the ethnoreligious pluralism of the old-country." They cite attendance at St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church as an example.

<sup>32</sup> Morawska, 172-73, 291, 338-39 n55. John Bodnar, "Immigration and Modernization: The Case of Slavic Peasants in Industrial America," in American Working Class Culture: Explorations in American Labor and Social History, ed. Milton Cantor (Westport, Conn., 1979), 340-41.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 11)

The steamship agency run by Hungarian Victor Faith at 122-24 Chestnut St. in Cambria City was a very important establishment in the neighborhood (HABS Nos. PA-5748 and PA-5749). Its function as ticket agency and post office served to link the Old and New Worlds. Residents could purchase tickets to return to their old lives, send for relatives to join them in new ones, or send money they earned in their Johnstown "home" to aid those who preferred to stay behind. Victor Faith exemplifies the type of person who made the commitment to stay in America. An entrepreneur who had a varied business roles as a cigar merchant, landlord, hotel owner, and distillery operator, Faith was able to purchase the substantial brick building in 1892 for \$400.

While immigrant men worked a ten-to-twelve-hour shift in the mills and mines, their wives often worked longer hours using their homes and the local hillsides to supplement family income. Farmers around Johnstown rented small plots to immigrant families where women kept gardens and sometimes chickens, pigs, or cows.<sup>33</sup> Couples who rented or owned a house often rented bed and board to some of the many single men who did not yet have wives to provide food, clean clothing, and housing. According to the 1900 census, Michael Dupin's unnamed wife took care of her husband, two sons, and nine boarders. They lived at 317 Second St. in Cambria City, a small 26' x 14', two-story frame house (HABS No. PA-5769). The Dupins were listed as Hungarians who had immigrated in 1892. Joseph Komara and his wife were also Hungarian immigrants, but had arrived a few years sooner than the Dupins. In 1887 Joseph bought half a lot at 403 Chestnut St. (HABS No. PA-5750). After the 1889 flood he replaced the original building there with a two-story, double house. In the late 1890s Komara was able to purchase another property on Broad Street, possibly aided by the income from several cows tended by his wife and recorded in tax-assessment records. In 1900 the Komaras were renting one portion of their house on Chestnut Street to a mill laborer who had two children and a wife who was keeping five Hungarian boarders--all employees of the Iron Company. In 1902, Komara built a second two-unit dwelling at the rear of his Chestnut Street lot, facing on to Brallier Alley, and rented this out as well (HABS No. PA-5754).

One block of ramshackle and unsanitary company housing for immigrants adjacent to Cambria City was christened "Rotten Row" by the local newspaper.<sup>34</sup> Other company housing, probably located on Prospect Hill above the Lower Works, was described in 1887 as "surrounded by huge piles of refuse from the furnace . . . . Outside privies built upon vaults, and prominently exposed to the view of the passerby, are located near the houses. The drainage is surface, there being no escape for slops and other waste matter."<sup>35</sup> The native-born and West European residents of Johnstown

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<sup>33</sup> Morawska and Weber, 299.

<sup>34</sup> "Rotten Row," Johnstown Tribune (June 6, 1882).

<sup>35</sup> Joel B. McCamant, Bureau of Industrial Statistics, Annual Report, Part III, 14 (Harrisburg, 1887),

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 12)

perpetually condemned the East Central Europeans for their sanitation practices. The "overpowering filth [of] these small foreign tenements," concluded Nathan Shappee, helped build a wall between the two groups. "Johnstownners had been breathing cinders and the stench from the rivers and open sewers for almost fifty years," Shappee relates, "but, somehow, foreign dirt seemed indecent."<sup>36</sup> Johnstown, once a city of foreigners, treated its newest residents as a necessary evil.<sup>37</sup>

By 1892, tax-assessment records show that company housing in Cambria City had been demolished or sold off. In Minersville, however, the company presence remained strong. The Hoover and Hughes contracting company built sixteen houses in Minersville for Cambria Iron in 1881, and in 1889 the company began a new spate of construction. A 1911 inventory of company property recorded thirty-seven houses in the neighborhood. They each had five rooms, running water, and a "closet"--a privy set at the back of each lot--and rented for \$5.40 per month (HABS Nos. PA-5672-7, PA-5771, PA-5772, PA-5773, and PA-5774).<sup>38</sup>

Many of these houses are still extant. They are two-story, two-unit dwellings with horizontal wood siding, stone basements, and gable-front roofs. Most are located along each side of Iron Street. In 1900 the tenants of 227 Iron St. were James Cosgrove, his wife and five children (HABS No. PA-5781). Cosgrove had come to America in 1870 and worked as a stamper in the bloom mill. His next-door neighbors in the other half of the house (229 Iron St.) were John Sullivan and his wife and four children. Sullivan, who also worked in the bloom mill, came to America from Wales in 1882. The ethnicity of these men reflects the slower pace at which Minersville was changed by East European immigration. It was not until after World War I that the neighborhood gained a larger East European population.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1910s the Cambria Steel Company began selling off the dwellings on the north side of Iron Street, and in the 1940s Bethlehem Steel sold the remaining properties on the south side. They are now all privately owned. Today, Minersville consists mainly of Honan Avenue and Iron and Benshoff streets. There are only a few homes left along Connelly Street. The neighborhood is strikingly different from Cambria City. It is much smaller, but its buildings are much more spread out; its topography and street pattern

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20, quoted in Shappee, 274-75. Morawska, 93.

<sup>36</sup> Shappee, 583-84.

<sup>37</sup> Morawska, 101.

<sup>38</sup> "Building in Johnstown and Surroundings," Johnstown Tribune (January 3, 1882). "Tenements" folder: Welfare Work 1911: box. Cambria Steel, Acc. 1699, BSC, Hagley Museum, Wilmington, Del.

<sup>39</sup> "Minersville faded, not finished," Johnstown Tribune-Democrat April 7, 1985.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 13)

are very different and, unlike Cambria City which has no remaining company housing, many of the houses are identical in form, although individual owners have by now added individual changes. The neighborhood's public school has been torn down, and the saloons and stores have vacated the old business district near the former entrance to the Lower Works.

Privately built houses in Minersville and Cambria City are as varied as the number of ethnic groups who lived in them (HABS Nos. PA-5775 and PA-5776). The majority are two-story, wood-frame buildings, but they range from two to four bays with side-, front-, or cross-gable roofs. The survey of all the buildings in Cambria City and Minersville confirms some general impressions. There are 195 houses in Cambria City, ninety-seven in Minersville. The houses are overwhelmingly wood frame: 94 percent in Cambria City, 99 percent in Minersville. Most of the wood structures were probably originally covered with wood cladding, but only about one-quarter of them are today. Instead, asbestos (especially in Cambria City), asphalt (especially in Minersville), aluminum, and vinyl sidings cover two-thirds of the wood-framed houses today. The houses are mostly two and two-and-a-half stories; one-story houses are rare. The roof shapes are mostly gable. The side-gable roof, where the ridgeline is parallel to the street, is most popular in Cambria City, whereas the front-gable roof, with the ridgeline perpendicular to the street, is favored in Minersville. The majority of houses in both neighborhoods are designed to accommodate a single family, but 27 percent of Cambria City houses and 46 percent of Minersville houses are two-family.

The inhabitants of these houses endured discrimination, hard work, and long hours, for America promised the opportunity to earn a better living, own a home, and build a better life than they could foresee in the villages of Eastern Europe. These dwellings reflect their ability to adapt to the challenging hardships they found in Johnstown, and at the same time reflect the increased importance given to a sense of community and tradition as a counter to the bewildering situation.

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<sup>40</sup> Two abbreviations have been used here to indicate the location of a number of sources--JFM for the Johnstown Flood Museum and JPL for the Johnstown Public Library, the David Glosser Memorial Library.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 15)

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NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 16)

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Project Information: This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP). An overview of history of the city (HABS No. PA-5669) provides the context for these neighborhoods. See additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Jeffery Hickey and Bernadette Coslin in August 1988 under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian, and Kim E. Wallace, the supervisory historian of the project. Hickey's, Coslin's, and other project historians' work was published as The Character of a Steel Mill City: Four Historic Neighborhoods of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1989), edited by Kim E. Wallace. Illustrations in the publication include large format photographs taken by HAER photographer Jet Lowe and 35 mm photographs taken by the project historians.

CAMBRIA CITY AND MINERSVILLE  
NEIGHBORHOODS  
HABS No. PA-5672 (Page 23)

Fig. 1.1 City of Johnstown, Wards 14-16, Minersville and Cambria City.  
Collection: City of Johnstown.

